

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 AID-05 OMB-01 TRSE-00 SS-15
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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3099

C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 2847

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAID SREF BC
SUBJ: GOB REQUEST THAT REFUGEE AID BE PROCESSED BILATERALLY

1. EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED FOLLOWING UNSOLICITED LETTER DATED AUG 25, TO THE AMBASSADOR FROM PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY CHARLES TIBONE: "I HAVE BEEN INFORMED THAT THE US GOVERNMENT IS CONSIDERING THE POSSIBILITY OF PROVIDING SOME AID TO REFUGEES IN SOUTHERN AFRICAN COUNTRIES. I BELIEVE A BILL ON THIS SUBJECT HAS BEEN, OR IS DUE TO BE PRESENTED TO CONGRESS.

--IF MY INFORMATION IS CORRECT, I WOULD LIKE TO REQUEST THAT ANY AID THAT IS EARMARKED FOR BOTSWANA BE PROCESSED BILATERALLY RATHER THAN THROUGH THE MULTILATERAL CHANNELS.

--I DO HOPE THAT IT WILL BE POSSIBLE FOR YOUR GOVERNMENT TO ACCEDE TO THIS REQUEST."

2. EMBOFF VISITED TIBONE AUG 25 FOR DISCUSSION OF LETTER AND GENERAL SUBJECT OF US REFUGEE ASSISTANCE IN BOTSWANA. TIBONE PREFACED HIS REMARKS BY SAYING THAT GOB WAS NOT INSISTING ON CHANGE FROM PRESENT US SYSTEM OF CHANNELING REFUGEE FUNDS THROUGH UNHCR. NEVERTHELESS, GOB WOULD PREFER TO SEE TRANSFER OF FUNDS HANDLED BILATERALLY FOR FOLLOWING REASONS:

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--A) GOB WOULD BE BETTER ABLE TO IDENTIFY AND RECOGNIZE US REFUGEE RELIEF CONTRIBUTION.

--B) BILATERAL TRANSFER WOULD REMOVE UNHCR AS UNPRODUCTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE LAYER BETWEEN DONOR AND RECIPIENT.

3. TIBONE THEN ELABORATED ON POINT 2(B) ABOVE BY DESCRIBING

CURRENT SYSTEM FOR TRANSFER OF RESOURCES PROVIDED BY UNHCR. LOCAL UNHCR OFFICE RECEIVES FROM GENEVA AUTHORITY TO TRANSFER FUNDS TO BOTSWANA COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES WHICH IS CHAIRED BY TIBONE AND MADE UP OF REPRESENTATIVES FROM GOV, UNHCR, BOTSWANA CHRISTIAN COUNCIL, IUEF, AND RED CROSS. ACCORDING TO TIBONE, BCR STAFF ACTUALLY ALLOCATES MONEY TO SPECIFIC PROJECTS AND KEEPS ALL ACCOUNTS; ONLY FUNCTION OF LOCAL UNHCR OFFICE IS MONITORING AND OVERSIGHT. HE SUGGESTED THAT USAID MIGHT BYPASS UNHCR MACHINERY TO MAKE BLOCK REFUGEE GRANTS DIRECT TO BCR WHILE PERFORMING REQUIRED MONITORING OF USE OF US CONTRIBUTION. IN CONCLUSION, TIBONE EMPHASIZED THAT GOB HAD NO SERIOUS QUARREL WITH EXISTING SYSTEM BUT SIMPLY WISHED TO MAKE ITS PREFERENCE KNOWN WHILE FY 79 AID AUTHORIZATION BILL IS STILL BEFORE CONGRESS.

4. WE SUBSEQUENTLY DISCUSSED SYSTEM FOR DISBURSEMENTS OF UNHCR FUNDS WITH RESREP PERKINS WHO CONFIRMED THAT FUNDS ARE TRANSFERRED IN BLOCK GRANTS TO BCR. ACCORDING TO PERKINS, EACH GRANT IS ACCOMPLISHED BY WRITTEN AGREEMENT (INCLUDING BUDGET) SIGNED BY PERKINS AS LOCAL UNHCR REP AND TIBONE AS BCR CHAIRMAN. ONLY EXCEPTIONS TO THIS PROCEDURE ARE LARGE CAPITAL CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS, SUCH AS US FINANCED SECONDARY SCHOOLS, WHICH ARE COVERED BY AGREEMENT SIGNED WITH GOB MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING.

5. COMMENT AND ACTION REQUESTED: BILATERAL PROCESSING OF US
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REFUGEE ASSISTANCE WOULD RESPOND POSITIVELY TO EXPRESSED GOB PREFERENCE AND WOULD RESULT IN OUR RECEIVING MORE POLITICAL CREDIT HERE FOR OUR REFUGEE RELIEF EFFORTS. THIS IS EMPHATICALLY IN OUR OVERALL POLICY INTERESTS AND IN LINE WITH OUR OBJECTIVES. MOREOVER, BILATERAL TRANSFER OF ASSISTANCE DIRECTLY TO BCR WOULD BYPASS ESSENTIALLY UNPRODUCTIVE UNHCR ADMINISTRATIVE LAYER.

6. HOWEVER, WE DO NOT KNOW ALL THE REASONS THAT HAVE UP TO NOW OBLIGED TO USG TO CHANNEL FUNDS THROUGH UNHCR. IF LEGISLATION IS THE OBSTACLE, PERHAPS IT COULD BE CHANGED TO GIVE US SOME FLEXIBILITY. DEPARTMENT WILL ALSO BE BETTER ABLE TO JUDGE WHETHER PROCESSING OF FUNDS THROUGH THEORETICALLY APOLITICAL AND EXPERIENCED UNHCR IS NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT FOR ASSISTANCE TO SOUTHERN AFRICA REFUGEES. SPECIFICALLY, WOULD BILATERAL TRANSFER OF RESOURCES TO BCR RAISE PROFILE OF OUR ASSISTANCE AND LEAD TO PUBLIC AND CONGRESSIONAL ALLEGATIONS THAT US IS DIRECTLY AIDING LIBERATION MOVEMENTS? WE WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT AND AID/W COMMENT INCLUDING ANY SPECIFIC POINTS WHICH SHOULD BE MADE IN OUR REPLY TO TIBONE.

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